

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01

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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7081

INFO USCINCEUR

CINCUSNAVEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TUNIS 6282

USCINCEUR ALSO FOR POLAD

CINCUSAVEUR ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, TS US

SUBJECT: BILATERAL PHIBLEX WITH TUNISIA

REF: A) TUNIS CHUSLOT 131010Z SEP; B) USCINCEUR 031230Z OCT

1. SUMMARY: AFTER MOST CAREFUL EXAMINATION OF PROPOSED JOINT TRAINING OPERATION INVOLVING EITHER AMPHIBOUS LANDINGS ON TUNISIAN COAST, OR "TURNAWAY" LANDINGS (REF B), WE HAVE RELUCTANTLY CONCLUDED THAT EVEN THE PROPOSAL OF LESS DRAMATIC "TURNAWAY" LANDINGS WOULD BE INADVISABLE BECAUSE: A) IT WOULD PUT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA ON THE SPOT; B) IT RISKS EXPOSING TUNISIA TO ARAB RECRIMINATIONS; C) IT INVITES A SOVIET OR OTHER BALANCING ACT; AND D) IT COULD CREATE FALSE EXPECTATIONS REGARDING USG SECURITY UNDERTAKING. DAY MAY COME, SUCH AS IN INSTANCE OF BREAKTHROUGH IN MIDDLE EAST PEACE NEGOTIATIONS, WHEN OPERATION LIKE PHIBLEX BECOMES MANAGEABLE. MEANWHILE, EMBASSY BELIEVES PREREQUISITE IS TO BUILD GRADUALLY TOWARD IT, AS FOR EXAMPLE THROUGH PURSUING INFORMAL TUNISIAN SUGGESTION FOR JOINT FLEET EXERCISE
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AT SEA. IN REACHING THIS CONCLUSION, WE HAVE GIVEN

FULL WEIGHT TO PRESENT EXCELLENT GOT-SIXTH FLEET
RELATION. END SUMMARY.

2. THERE ARE NUMBER OF REASONS WHY WE BELIEVE THAT
AMPHIBIOUS TRAINING OPERATION ALONG TUNISIAN SHORES
IS NOT RPT NOT PRESENTLY ADVISABLE, AS FOLLOWS:

3. PUTS BOURGUIBA ON THE SPOT. PHIBLEX DECISION,
REPRESENTING IMPORTANT NEW DIMENSION IN US-TUNISIAN
MILITARY COOPERATION, WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE TO
BE BUCKED UP TO PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA. WHILE EXERCISE
PROPOSAL IS ONE THAT WE BELIEVE BOURGUIBA WOULD PREFER
NOT TO RECEIVE AT THIS TIME, IMPORTANCE HE ATTACHES
TO TUNISIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP MIGHT WELL INCLINE
HIM TO AGREE TO IT AS A FAVOR TO US. TROUBLE WITH
THIS IS THAT WE WOULD BE ASKING HIM TO IGNORE IMPACT
EXERCISE MIGHT HAVE ON HIS RELATIONS WITH HIS TWO
NEIGHBORS, ALGERIA AND LIBYA, AS WELL AS IMPLICATIONS
RE POSSIBLE PRECEDENT IT SETS IN CONNECTION WITH
SOVIET FLEET ACTIVITIES AS THEY RELATE TO TUNIS.
GRANTED THESE IMPLICATIONS ARE PRIMARILY BOURGUIBA'S
OWN CONCERN RATHER THAN OURS, BUT OUR RATHER FAVORED
POSITION IN TUNISWA CARRIES WITH IT AN OBLIGATION TO
AVOID ABUSING THAT POSITION, I.E., BY FORCING BOURGUIBA'S
HAND IN WAYS AND AT TIMES INIMICAL TO HIS INTERESTS
AND PERHAPS TO OUR OWN LONG-RANGE INTERESTS.

4. RISKS EXPOSING TUNISIA TO ARAB RECRIMINATIONS.
AMONG BOURGUIBA'S INTERESTS PARTICULARLY AS LONG AS HE REMAINS
STRONGLY PRO-WEST PROCLAIMS PUBLICLY HIS FRIENDSHIP FOR US AND
SUPPORT SIXTH FLEET, IS THAT TUNISIA MAINTAINS ITS ARAB CREDENTIALS
AND, IN PARTICULAR, ALGERIAN AND LIBYA "NON-BELLIGERENCY".
TUNISIA'S ALLOWING USE ITS BEACHES BY SIXTH FLEET
FOR PRACTICE LANDINGS RISKS BEING CHARACTERIZED BOTH
PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY AS TUNISIA'S CONSPIRING WITH
USG TO FACILITATE MILITARY LANDINGS IN ARAB WORLD
GENERALLY, AND NORTH AFRICA PARTICULARLY. SINCE IT
WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE KEEP TRAINING FROM BECOMING KNOWN,
MEDIA MIGHT WELL POINT OUT THAT NO SUCH OPERATIONS
(OTHER THAN UNFORTUNATE PRECEDENT, AS SEEN BY MANY
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ARABS, OF LEBANESE LANDINGS OF 1958) HAVE OCCURRED IN
NORTH AFRICA OR ARAB WORLD SINCE WORLD WAR TWO. AT
PRESENT TIME, IN CONTEXT BOTH OF CONCERN OVER TENSIONS
GENERATED BY PETROLEUM PRICE RISES AND OF INCREASING
TALK OF A NEW OUTBREAK OF ARAB/ISRAELI WARFARE,
AMPHIBIOUS
LANDINGS IN TUNISIA WOULD PREDICTABLY GENERATE ESPECIALLY
CRITICAL COMMENTARY TO EFFECT THAT USG IS BLANTANTLY

BRANDISING ITS MILITARY IN RESPONSE TO ARAB USE OF
"OIL WEAPON".

5. INVITES SOVIET OR OTHER BALANCING ACT. IN BILATERAL TERMS,
WE WOULD RUN RISK THAT IF BOURGUIBA APPROVES AMPHIBIOUS
EXERCISE, GOT OFFICIALS AT LEVELS BELOW BOURGUIBA
MIGHT FEEL OBLIGATED TO TAKE STEPS TO COUNTER, TO EXTENT
POSSIBLE, ANY ADVERSE IMPACT ON GOT'S RELATIONS IN
ARAB AND THIRD WORLDS. THIS COULD TAKE THE FORM OF
"BALANCING ACTS", IN LINE WITH GOT'S TRADITIONAL POLICY.
IT WOULD BE UNFORTUNATE IN OUR OPINION IF SUCH BALANCING
TOOK THE FORM OF INCREASED PRIVILEGES ACCORDED BY GOT
TO SOVIET FLEET, OR DECREASED VISITING PRIVILEGES FOR
US SIXTH FLEET. SENIOR LEVELS OF BUREAUCRACY MIGHT
EVEN BE IMPELLED BY OUR PROPOSAL TO REVIEW, FOR WHAT
MIGHT BE FIRST TIME AT HIGH LEVEL, THE ACTUAL VOLUME
OF OUR SHIP VISITS AS COMPARED WITH SOVIET AND OTHER
NAVAL CALLS. IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT DECISION COULD
FOLLOW, ALLEGEDLY BASED ON NEED FOR IMPARTIALITY, TO
LIMIT ALL NAVIES TO CERTAIN LEVEL OF VISITS, LOWER THAN
THAT SIXTH FLEET NOW ENJOYS.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7082

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TUNIS 6282

6. CREATES FALSE EXPECTATIONS RE USG SECURITY
UNDERTAKING. ONE REASON WHY PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA MIGHT
BE INCLINED TO FAVOR PROPOSAL IS THAT IT WOULD REIN-

FORCE HIS ASSUMPTION THAT USG INDEED STANDS READY TO MAKE AVAILABLE ITS "SECURITY UMBRELLA" IF TUNISIA TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY IS THREATENED. BOURGUIBA'S ASSUMPTION IN THIS RESPECT IS ONE WHICH WE HAVE AVOIDED DISCREDITING, BECAUSE AMONG OTHER THINGS IT HAS ENABLED BOURGUIBA TO CONCENTRATE THE BULK OF TUNISIA'S LIMITED RESOURCES ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND VERY LITTLE ON ITS MILITARY. AS AN INSURANCE FACTOR, IT HAS ALSO HAD A GENERAL CALMING INFLUENCE. AT SAME TIME, HOWEVER, WE HAVE CAREFULLY AVOIDED STRENGTHENING BOURGUIBA'S IMPRESSION THAT WE WOULD IN EXTREMIS INTERVENE MILITARILY BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT THIS IS NOT IN THE CARDS. IN OUR VIEW AMPHIBIOUS LANDINGS ALONG TUNISIAN COAST DO RISK LENDING CREDENCE TO THIS ASSUMPTION. BOURGUIBA MIGHT SEE SUCH AN OPERATION AS PRACTICE FOR THE DAY WHEN USG WILL COME TO HIS DEFENSE.

7. FOR ALL THESE REASONS, PLUS POSSIBLE ADVERSE IMPACT ON OUR OWN BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH ALGERIA AND LIBYA AND OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES (WHICH DEPARTMENT IN CONFIDENTIAL

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BETTER POSITION TO ASSESS), WE THINK EXERCISE IN ANY FORM IS TOO LARGE A STEP TO TAKE AT THIS TIME AND WE RECOMMEND AGAINST IT. WE HAVE NO READY ALTERNATIVE TO SUGGEST, BUT IT DOES SEEM TO US THAT IF EXERCISE OF THIS MAGNITUDE IS EVER TO BE CONTEMPLATED -- PERHAPS AFTER BREAKTHROUGH IN MIDDLE EAST PEACE NEGOTIATIONS -- WE SHOULD FIRST BUILD UP TO IT GRADUALLY. TUNISIAN CHIEF NAVAL OPERATIONS HAS SUGGESTED SOME KIND OF JOINT EXERCISE INVOLVING TUNISIAN NAVY AND SIXTH FLEET. ASSUMING "PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA" WILL AGAIN BE OPERATIONAL BEFORE LONG, USCINCEUR MIGHT GIVE SOME CONSIDERATION TO HIS SUGGESTION EVEN THOUGH AT THIS STAGE IT PROBABLY DOES NOT HAVE FORMAL BLESSING OF GOT. IF SOME KIND OF SIMPLE EXERCISE LIKE THIS COULD BE ARRANGED AND EXECUTED SUCCESSFULLY, IT COULD SERVE AS ONE STEPPING STONE TOWARD CLOSER AND BOLDER TUNISIAN-AMERICAN MILITARY COOPERATION IN FORM OF PHIBLEX OPERATION IF AND WHEN MIDDLE EAST PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE PERMITS US TO DO SO.

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